

Rhode Island and New England Microenterprise of the Year

At ProjectEngin, “E” is the Key

Ann Kaiser is the CEO of ProjectEngin, a STEM education consulting firm specifically focused on the inclusion of engineering design in the K-12 classroom. At ProjectEngin they believe there is no “right” answer, they believe in the idea that every student can define a problem, evaluate solutions, modify them, and reach an optimized final product. No problem or project is ever necessarily finished, but creates an education path to create a way of learning for the rest of their lives.

Ann drives her curricular and pedagogical efforts with the idea that innovative solutions to current and future challenges will require the combined efforts and talents of diverse thinkers. By educating the educators, ProjectEngin is creating a classroom culture of “engineers” who are not afraid to fail, an environment where a student’s imagination and vision is bolstered, promoting respect for each other’s divergent opinions; a brewing pot of collaboration. “Most of us engineer every day, we engineer processes to get us through the day,” expressed Ann, “If students can learn to think through the design process they can take that and apply it to diverse subjects, disciplines, and career fields”, she added.

As we sit together it becomes more and more evident that the driving force behind ProjectEngin is the passion of Ann and her team. Ann develops curriculum and provides workshop to schools in Rhode Island and throughout the country, with upcoming commitments in Virginia, Colorado, and New Jersey. While the long miles and even longer hours can be exhausting the reward is immeasurable. “I’ve seen a kindergartner who had a fulltime aide with him create composite beams made of pipe cleaners and straws,” Ann smiled and continued, “he came up with this structure all by himself and it held more books than anybody else’s in the class. The next day everybody wanted to work with him... it was his moment to shine.”

While ProjectEngin is blazing a trail for this educational philosophy they are anything but new to the genre. Ann began her career as an Engineer graduating from Columbia University’s School of Engineering and Applied Science (B.S. in Metallurgy and Materials Science) and the School of International and Public Affairs (Masters in International Affairs). Six months of research in Singapore as a Fulbright Distinguished Teacher further supported her vision of a better way to educate innovators.

Ann spent her most of her career split between being an engineer and an educator finding the principles of engineer key to the learning process. It is this meld of real-life engineering and educational experience that created her pedagogy, “We are not creating science lessons, we are not creating math lessons, we are creating projects and activities that help embed some engineering-design thinking and the engineering-design process into what they’re already doing.”

Ann continues educating future generations of innovative problem-solvers but never forgets the students who have already graduated from her programs. One student in particular, Christopher Horvat, recently received his PHD from Harvard University, choosing to dedicate his thesis to Ann, “Mrs. Kaiser

encouraged me to see the world as an explorer, not just a passive bystander. Her promotion of creativity, spontaneity, and child-like wonder are the most important parts of who I am as a researcher and person today.” said Dr. Christopher Horvat, “She is the reason I went into science, and I can’t thank her enough for her patience, excitement, and passion for education.” Horvat added.

For her dedication to educating America’s youth as well as her demonstrated success and potential for future growth, the U.S. Small Business Administration is pleased to honor Ann D. Kaiser, Owner and CEO of ProjectEngin, as the 2017 Rhode Island and New England Microenterprise of the Year.